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PROTESTS AGAINST AURANGZEB'S POLL-TAX

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Scanning through the records of the British Museum[1] and India Office[2] during my recent visit to London, I was somewhat intrigued to find yet another copy of the Persian document protesting against reimposition of Jizya or Poll-tax by Aurangzeb. The authorship of this document is attributed to Sobha Singh. Three other copies of this document with slight modification, have come down to us. One is preserved in the Royal Asiatic Society, London[3]; second in the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal Calcutta[4] and third in the ex-Maharana's Confidential Office at Udaipur.[5] The Royal Asiatic Society ascribes it to Shivaji the Asiatic Society of Bengal to Sambbhaji and the Maharana's Confidential Office to Raj Singh of Mewar.

II

This document was first made known to Europe by Robert Orme who attributes it to Jaswant Singh of Marwar,[6] James Tod[7] and Kaviraj Shyamal Das[7] are of the opinion that it was written by Raj Singh of Mewar. Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar,[8] Professor S.R.Sharma,[9] Dr. G.N.Sharma[10] and Dr. U.N.Day[11] ascribe it to Shivaji. Based on this last version a theory has been propounded that 'Akbar and not Rama was the ideal of Shivaji.'[12] Intrigued by the attribution of almost the same document to as many as five persons it is incumbent on us to examine the authentifity of this document in the light of external and internal evidence and this can not be done without scrutinizing the document which is reproduced hereunder.

All due praise be rendered to the glory of Almighty and munificence of your majesty, which is as conspicuous as the sun and moon. Although, separated from your sublime presence, your well-wisher is nevertheless zealous in the performance of every bounden act of obedience and loyalty. My ardent wishes and strenuous services are employed to promote the prosperity of the sultans, khans, mirs, mirzas, rajas and roys of the territory of Hindustan and the chiefs of Iran, Turan, Rum and Sham as also to the inhabitants of the seven climes and all persons travelling by land and by sea. This my inclination is well-known. Nor can your royal wisdom entertain a doubt thereof. In view, therefore, of my former services, and your majesty's condenscension, I presume to solicit the royal attention to certain circumstances in which the public as well as private welfare is greatly involved.

I have been informed that enormous sums have been dissipated in the prosecution of the designs formed against me, your well wisher and that you have ordered a tribute to be levied by way of jizya to satisfy the exigencies of your exhausted treasury. May it please your majesty that your royal ancestor Muhammad Jalal ud Din Akbar, lodged in heaven, conducted the affairs of this empire in equity and firm security for fifty two years, preserving every type of man in ease and happiness, whether they were followers of Jesus or Moses, David or Muhammad, Brahmins or Dharias, Asrias or Sevras. He followed the unique path of Sulh i kul or universal peace to such an extent that the people in gratitude for the indiscriminate protection afforded them, distinguished

him by the appellation of Jagat guru (World's Spiritual Guide). Similarly his majesty Muhammad Nur ud Din Jahangir, residing in heaven, extended for a period of twenty two years the shadow of his protection over the heads of his people; successful by constant fidelity to his allies and a vigorous exertion of his arms in business. Nor less did his majesty Sahib Qiran-i-Sani (Lord of Conjunction) Shah Jahan, dwelling in paradise, by a propitious reign of thirty two years, acquired to himself immortal reputation, the glorious reward of clemency and virtue.

Such were the benevolent policies of your ancestors. Whilst they pursued these great and generous principles, wheresoever they directed their steps, conquests and prosperity went ahead of them; they subjugated many territories and fortresses. During your majesty's reign many have, however, been alienated from the empire and further loss of territory must necessarily follow since devastation and rapine now universally prevail without restraint. Your subjects are trampled under foot and every province of your empire is impoverished; depopulation spreads, and difficulties accumulate. When indigence has reached the habitation of the sovereign and princes, what can be the condition of the nobles? The soldiery murmurs, merchants grumble, Musalmans disgruntled, Hindus destitute, and the multitude of people reduced to such a plight that even for a square meal they have to beat their heads throughout the day in rage and desperation.

How can the dignity be maintained of the sovereign who employs his power in exacting heavy tributes from the people

thus reduced to penury? The word has gone round the world that the emperor of Hindustan coveting the beggars' bowl exacts jizya from the poor Sevras, Bairagis, Sanyasis regardless of the illustrious honour of the house of Timur, and condescends to exercise his power over the soldiery inoffensive ancohoret.

If your majesty places any faith in these books, called divine, you will there be instructed that God is styled Rabbul alamin (Lord of all men) and not Rabbul Muslimin (Lord of Muslims) only. Verily paganism and Islam are juxtapoised in His presence. Distinctions of colour are of his ordination. It is He Who gives existence. In mosques to His name the call for prayer is given. In temples the bell is rung in yearning for Him. To vilify the religion and customs of other men is to set at naught the pleasure of Almighty. Defacement of a picture will naturally incur the displeasure of the painter and rightly has the poet sung:

"Disparage not anything ye behold, be it bad, be it good",
Finding fault with artefact tantamounts to Craftsman's criticism"

In fine, the tribute you demand from the Hindus is repugnant to justice; politically it can be allowed only if a handsome woman wearing golden ornaments can move from one part of the country to the other without any fear but now a days even cities are plundered. What should I say of the country side? Moreover it is an innovation and infringement of the laws of Hindustan. If zeal for your own religion has induced you to determine upon this measure, the demand ought by the rules of equity to have been made first upon Ram Singh 13 who is esteemed the principal amongst the Hindus. Then let your

well-wisher be called upon with whom you will have less difficulty to encounter; but to torment ants and flies is unworthy of a heroic or generous mind. It is indeed astonishing that the ministers of your government should have neglected to advise your Majesty to the rules of rectitude and honour."

IV

Sobha Singh to whom the British Museum and India Office ascribe this document can be identified with the Talukdar of Chitwa and Bardha (then part of Burdwan) who is reported to have taken up arms against the Mughal Government in 1696 A.D.[14] when his relations with the Mughals were estranged but the jizya was imposed by Aurangzeb on Wednesday, 1st Rabi I/2nd April, 1679 A.D.[15] The question is naturally posed: Why did Sobha Singh take as many as seven years to lodge a protest against the imposition of jizya? Moreover, Sobha Singh was a petty zamindar and as such could not be credited with the tall claims made by the author of the document. It cannot, therefore, be ascribed to Sobha Singh. Nor could it be attributed to Jaswant Singh of Marwar who had passed away on 10th December 1678 A.H.[16] about three months before the jizya was imposed. Similarly it could not be ascribed to Sambhaji who was not entitled to all that has been claimed in the document. Moreover disaffected with his father he had joined the Mughal camp on 13th December 1678 A.H. and was given the rank of hafthazari and the title of Raja[17] which he enjoyed till 23rd November 1679 A.D. when he quitted the Mughal camp.[18] Thus he continued to support Aurangzeb for more than six months after the imposition of the jizya. Likewise his father

Shivaji could not be the author of this document, in view of the internal and external evidence. How could Shivaji, who had declared himself as Chhatrapati or paramount sovereign in 1674 A.D.,[19] profess 'loyalty' and 'obedience' to Aurangzeb in 1679 A.D.? What services did Shivaji render for the welfare of the Mughal Government? How far were these services known to the rulers of Iran, Turan, Rum, Sham and the inhabitants of the seven climes as claimed in the document? Is there any external evidence to prove that Aurangzeb had demanded jizya from Shivaji who was a sovereign ruler and not a zimmi or protected subject expected to pay the poll-tax? If the answer is 'no' then Shivaji could not be considered the author of this document. Similarly it is not possible to ascribe it to Raj Singh for three reasons. Firstly no contemporary Rajput source refers to the remonstration of the Rana against the jizya. Had there been such a remonstration the local annalists would not have failed to make a mention of it.[20] Secondly soon after the imposition of the jizya Raj Singh is reported to have sent Prince Jai Singh and Garibdas, the chief priest, to the imperial court where they were well received by Aurangzeb who sent them back with khilat or robe of honour, a necklace , an elephant, a horse and a farman for the Rana on 30 April, 1679 A.D.[21] Thirdly the document under discussion does not bear at the top the legend huwal Ghalib (He is Supreme) which was the sarnameh or superscription employed by Raj Singh in his Persian letters.[22]

V

If this document can not be ascribed to any of these five persons then who could be its author? The document bears

neither the name of the writer, nor his seal, nor the date of transcription as was the practice in those days. Nor does it possess peculiar form of address or conclusion as required by the documentation canons of the time. Moreover Akbar and Jahangir are wrongly referred to as Muhammad Jalalud Din Akbar and Muhammad Nurud Din Jahangir instead of Jalulud Din Muhammad Akbar and Nurud Din Muhammad Jahangir. What is more striking is the fact that the posthumous titles of these two emperors are followed by their names, and Shah Jahan has been referred to by his life-time title of Sahib Qiran i Sani only. This is absolutely against the diplomatic practices of the period. In those days it was considered height of impropriety to mention the emperors, princes or princesses by name. In life the emperors were designated as the Khalifa or Caliph, Zillullah or shadow of God etc. and after death by distinct posthumous titles, all meaning lodged in heaven, as mentioned hereunder:

Emperor	Posthumous title
Babur	Firdausmakani
Humayun	Jannat ashyani
Akbar	Arsh ashyani
Jahangir	Jannat makani
Shah Jahan	Firdaus ashyani

23

In the circumstances mentioned above a big question mark naturally hangs over the authenticity of this document. If its genuineness is doubted then two questions are naturally posed: When was it fabricated? What could be the motivation behind such fabrication? The document was first brought to light, by Robert Orme (1760-1835 A.D.) who included it in his Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire which was published

in 1782 A.D. when he was Historiographer to the East India Company (1764-1801 A.D.).[24] It would, therefore, not be wrong to conclude that the document might have been fabricated about the seventies of the 18th century. This seems to have been the work of some politician who chose this way of providing documentary evidence in support of the protests made against the poll-tax and attributed it to such Hindu rulers who were for one reason or the other aggrieved by Aurangzeb.

VI

The reimposition of the poll-tax evoked protests not only from the Hindus but also from the Muslims. We are told that when Aurangzeb rode out on an elephant to say his Friday prayers, people blocked his path from the Fort to Jame Masjid. When all attempts failed he ordered the elephants to be driven through the crowd trampling underfoot many of the protestants. This demonstration continued for several days and many demonstrators lost their lives.[25] The imposition of the jizya was opposed by a section of the royalty including Prince Muhammad Akbar, Prince Muazzam and Prince Azam.[26] Jahanara Begam, the eldest sister of Aurangzeb considered it politically inexpedient. Appealing to her brother to revise his decision she is reported to have said, "Just think, Sire, that the lands of Hindustan are like a vast ocean; your majesty and all the other members of our royal family are like ships navigating its waters and ploughing through its waves. Where is there any sovereign prince who would desire to load with imposts the sea on which he sails? Who has ever seen the physician pay the patient? From this reasoning I conclude, with your majesty's permission, that if the sick man has to pay the physician who cures him;

if the ships and the sailors must always try to render the seas favourable and pacific towards them in order to navigate with success and arrive happily at port; in the same way your majesty ought to appease and soften the ocean of your subjects. For in what way can you expect them to pay taxes if you overburden them and provoke their waves by this unaccustomed demand? Abandon, then, Sire, this purpose, lest there be a rebellion in this kingdom. Let your majesty reflect that violent winds usually raise and disturb the seas, swell high their waves, and transform the whole into a terrifying tempest. By its violence everything is swept to the shore, and the poor and persecuted people are ruined."[27] In protesting against the poll-tax Jahanara seems to have the support of a section of the powerful nobility. This is borne out by the fact that Asad Khan and Zulfaqar Khan - primer nobles of Aurangzeb, played a leading role in the abolition of the jizya shortly after the death of Aurangzeb.[28]

VII

In sum, then, the authenticity of the document under discussion is in doubt but the fact can not be denied that the revival of the poll-tax by Aurangzeb did evoke protests from the Hindus and the Muslims who were nurtured in the liberal traditions ushered in by Akbar. This class naturally resented the growing clerical influence in the political affairs in as much as it alienated majority of the Hindus and thereby frustrated its cherished dream of establishing a secular monarchy of sorts broadbased upon religious toleration enshrined as it was in the doctrine of Sulh i Kul or 'Universal Peace' enunciated by Akbar."

References

1. British Museum, London, or 9877.

2. India Office Library and Records, London, 2538.

3. Royal Asiatic Society, London, 71.

4. Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 56.

5. James Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, I (London, 1914), p. 302.

6. Robert Orme, Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, (London, 1805), p. 252.

7. Tod, op.cit., p. 302; Kaviraj Shyamal Das, Vir Vinod, Vol. II, p. 462.

8. Jadunath Sarkar, Shivaji and His Times (Calcutta, 1948), pp. 306-09.

9. S.R. Sharma, The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors, (Bombay, 1962), p. 153.

10. G.N. Sharma, Mewar and the Mughal Emperors (Agra, 1954), pp. 164-65.

11. U.N. Day, Some Aspects of Medieval India (Allahabad, 1971), pp. 233-34.

12. Ideas in History (Delhi, 1968), p. 189.

13. Ram Singh, son of Mirza Raja Jai Singh, succeeded his father in 1666 A.D. T.W. Beale, Oriental Biographical Dictionary (Calcutta, 1881), p. 221.

14. Calcutta Review, January, 1910, pp. 122-23.

15. Saqi Mustaid Khan, Maasiri Alamgiri (Calcutta, 1947), p. 108.

16. Ibid., p. 106.

17. Bhim Sen, Tarikhi Dilkusha, Eng. tr. J.N. Sarkar and ed. V.G. Khobrekar (Bombay, 1972), p. 121.

18. Ibid., p. 122.

19. Sarkar, op.cit., p. 207.

20. Sharma (G.N.), op.cit., p. 164.

21. Saqi Mustaid Khan, op.cit., p. 108.

22. Kaviraj Shyamal Das, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 440.

23. Jadunath Sarkar, Mughal Administration, (Calcutta, 1952), p. 220.

Kaviraj is the acknowledged leading pandit of Banswara who greatly assisted by the knowledge of his ancestors

24. C.E. Buckland, Dictionary of Indian Biography (London, 1906), p. 323.

25. Khafi Khan, Muntakhabul Lubab, in H.M. Elliot and John Dowson's History of India, VII (London, 1877), p. 296.

26. Satish Chandra, Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, (New Delhi, 1972), pp. 23-24.

27. Niccolas Manucci, Storia Do Mogor, Vol. III (London, 1907), pp. 289-90.

28. Satish Chandra, op.cit., pp. 74, 85.

whether of the 18th or 19th c. it is a good document in 2nd. Nile But it is more likely of the 17th : it is not easy to forge good documents. you may forge a little deed but you can't forge a document which brings out the mind of the people in language which only those who have suffered can express. these words have come from the heart of the people. one may say that Raj Singh or Shivaji may not have written it to prove it. the author may have purposely remained anonymous. If he was found out the vindictive Aurangzeb would punish him & his family. What might have been in the mind of the author was that Aurangzeb knew the feelings of the masses not that the author was get credit for discovering a good record. In fact small and considered mistakes in the document may have been introduced by the author to mislead Aurangzeb from finding out the real author.

All that can be said in favour of this paper that the author conclusively does not disprove that the document was written by Prithvi Singh, Sambhaji, Shivaji & Jaswant Singh or Raj Singh. But it cannot be said to be a forgery. It is an authentic document so far as the expression of the mind of the people in the period of Shivaji & his victories were to make known their feelings to Aurangzeb.

We may compare this with Vidyapati Kavindra, the contemporary of Shah Jahan. At that time the Hindus suffered great hardship owing to the exaction of a pilgrim tax from the Hindus that came to Benares & Prayag